

Chapter 4

Public Realm

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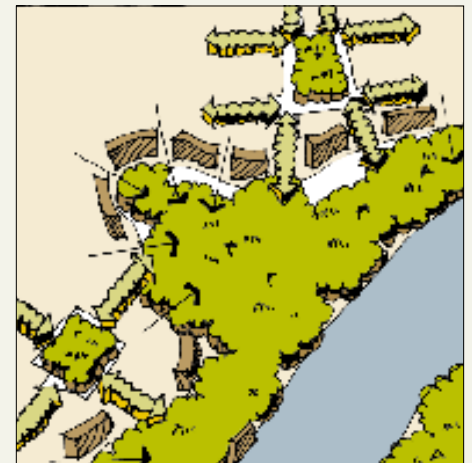
Public Realm

4.1 Parks, recreation and open space: focus, reconnection and a catalyst for re-investment.

Parks, recreation and open space are necessary to a vital urban core. High-quality public facilities provide a central focus for new development, contribute to a coherent network of public spaces, and stimulate private investment. Efforts to strengthen the park, recreation and open space system and to “green” the downtown and riverfront are already underway.

Building on the highly successful redevelopment efforts already completed in the downtown area (Mears Park, Rice Park, Kellogg Park and Lower Landing Park), those soon to be completed (Harriet Island Park), and the availability of former industrial sites in and around downtown, the Framework seeks to develop a mixture of urban villages organized around a series of green squares or small parks, and connected by a network of “green” streets, pathways and natural corridors.

The intent of the Development Framework is to green the downtown and connect previously disconnected elements of the public realm.





The retreat of the “industrial glacier” (below) creates a vast terrain of opportunity to reclaim and make connections along the Mississippi (above).



Greening is achieved through a variety of approaches including: street tree planting, development of new public squares and pocket parks, and the reclamation of derelict or underused spaces. Greening is put forward as a key element of the urban infrastructure, and all redevelopment areas should contribute to the effort. Tourism revenue and a variety of public/private initiatives are needed to fund public spaces and maintain a high level of quality.

4.2 Public realm goals and objectives.

Regional Parks, Trails and Open Spaces

Goal 1:

Provide easily recognizable and accessible connections between downtown Saint Paul, the riverfront and the city-wide and regional open space trail systems.

Goal 2:

Recognize and take full advantage of the historic and recreational significance of Saint Paul’s parkway and trail corridor system.

The Development Framework calls for reconnection of the urban system of green streets, walkways, parks and squares with local and regional parks and trails. These connections will be provided through a variety of proposed improvements, including street plantings, new walks, ramps and stairs, signage and lighting.

The intent is to enhance existing, or define new, opportunities for a variety of physical connections to serve all forms of movement, including pedestrian, bicycle and automobile. This will allow workers and residents of the downtown core and adjacent neighbor-

hoods to easily access the larger open space and trail systems leading into and out of the city. In addition, public and private initiatives to stitch together existing natural green corridors with new plantings will further improve the visual continuity between the downtown core, river, adjacent neighborhoods and regional green structure.

Objective: Provide major connections and trailheads to regional systems throughout the downtown and riverfront corridor. These connections should be clearly identified using signage, landscape treatment, lighting and special architectural elements, such as the Harriet Island-Lilydale trailhead, the future Phalen Creek Trailhead at Lower Landing Park and the regional trail corridor link along the Upper Landing redevelopment site.

Objective: Where possible, connect bicycle/pedestrian trails with streets and neighborhood access points at frequent intervals along the corridor to improve access and safety, such as the Phalen Creek trail through Swede Hollow.

Objective: Use street linkages to provide gracious access for all modes of movement, and include comfortable sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes, similar to Summit Avenue. Separate off-street bike/pedestrian paths where feasible. Landscaping should be a key element at each of these connections.

Objective: Where possible, integrate connections to regional trails and trailheads within new development.

Objective: Identify and enhance specific downtown streets to be improved as key green connections and access points to the river valley and valley reaches. Improvements should include street trees, intersection plantings, and other landscape treatments to emphasize these corridors. Examples include improved connections at Jackson, Sibley, 2nd, Chestnut, Ohio and Concord Streets, and new links at Wacouta and Broadway.

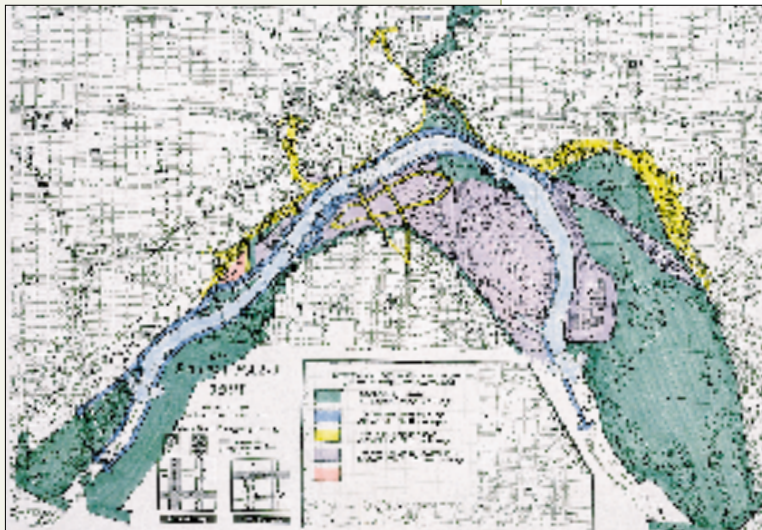
The Framework anticipates connections between downtown Saint Paul, the riverfront and the city-wide and regional open space trail systems.



Innovative solutions should be developed to create vertical pedestrian connections between the bluff top and the river valley.



The “Greening the Great River Park” initiative has established targets for green cover in the river valley.



- Ecological core at least 90% canopy
- Riparian greenway at least 50% canopy
- Inland greenway at least 50% canopy
- Environmentally integrated development 20-30% canopy

Objective:

Establish accessible and easily identifiable vertical pedestrian connections into the valley or its reaches from adjacent neighborhoods, the city balcony, at bridge heads and at selected points such as Kellogg Park, Irvine Park, Indian Mounds Park, East 3rd Street at Swede Hollow, and the West Side blufftop.

Green Structure

Goal 3:

Build on existing initiatives to establish an urban greening policy for the downtown, riverfront and river bottom areas.

Goal 4:

Strengthen, organize and humanize the public realm by recognizing that parks and open space are necessities for creating and sustaining a quality, livable downtown environment.

In Saint Paul, and specifically the downtown/riverfront area, vegetation has systematically been removed and the downtown core has become a concrete “island”. As a consequence of urban development patterns in the downtown core and along the riverfront, the green structure of Saint Paul is currently neither a dominant nor effective organizing element of the public realm. Unlike the surrounding neighborhoods, which are characterized by dense, linear patterns of trees that reinforce and enrich the street while providing a shaded and protected pedestrian zone, the downtown lacks the landscape patterns that complement the urban environment.

Building on existing initiatives, such as Greening the Great River Park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Plan, and plans and programs developed by the Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation, the Development Framework is focused on recreating Saint Paul as a green city on the river and extending the surrounding urban forest into the downtown area.

Objective:

Where possible, landscaping should occur in conjunction with street improvement projects. Design should emphasize plant health and maintenance to ensure long term viability, reduce replacement costs, and accommodate snow removal and other street maintenance operations. Initial work should occur on high-profile streets such as Wabasha, St. Peter, and 5th Streets and Kellogg Boulevard.

Objective:

Continue the aggressive landscape approach for the edges of the downtown island, including the freeway corridors, freeway entrances into downtown, and bridgeheads. Sites include the Lafayette/7th Street area, the I-35 entry at Wacouta Street, the I-35E/I-94 interchange, and the plazas on either end of the new Wabasha bridge.

Objective:

Promote uninterrupted connections between the downtown core, riverfront and adjacent neighborhoods. Provide a network of green streets to link urban villages, create additional parks and squares that provide signature green spaces, and where possible re-connect the natural landscape corridors along the bluffs and river with downtown green space.





Objective:

Where possible, revegetate underused or vacant sites; develop these areas as community gardens, buffers, green pockets and other open space amenities.

The Framework builds on existing initiatives to establish an urban greening policy for the downtown and riverfront.

1. Green riverfront
2. Restore bluffs
3. Green streets
4. Green parks/squares



-  Parks & squares
-  Green streets
-  Soften freeway edge
-  Natural/restored green

“Green” streets support an improved driving experience and a high-quality pedestrian and bicycle environment.

1. Wabasha Street
2. Robert Street
3. University Avenue
4. West 7th Street
5. Kellogg Boulevard
6. Fillmore Street
7. Plato Boulevard

Green Streets

Goal 5:

Develop a strategy for “greening” streets that supports an improved driving experience and a high-quality pedestrian and bicycle environment.

Movement into and out of downtown Saint Paul occurs primarily on freeways, freeway feeders, a number of key streets such as Kellogg Boulevard and West 7th Street and, in many cases, via bridges. The intent is to protect and enhance existing street plantings and to introduce new plantings wherever possible throughout the downtown core. The level or intensity of “greening” for each street will be determined by its classification, based on traffic flow, pedestrian use, and the desired visual character.

Objective:

Strengthen key “destination” streets, such as Wabasha, Concord, Robert and West 7th Streets and Kellogg Boulevard, with additional trees, flowering shrubs and flowers, decorative lighting, improved transit facilities, abundant street furnishings and facade improvements.

Objective:

Key routes between existing and proposed urban villages and between the downtown and the riverfront are classified as pedestrian “connector” streets, such as 5th, 6th, Wacouta and Water Streets. These streets should be emphasized as high-quality, green corridors, very pedestrian-friendly and inviting. They should receive improved lighting, street trees, additional planting as feasible, upgraded transit facilities and appropriately-placed street furnishings.



Objective: Re-establish the connection between the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods by providing intensive street-tree planting and decorative lighting along key connector streets.

Objective: The majority of the urban streets are classified for pedestrian use as “background” streets. These streets play an essential role in the overall character of the city and the ability to move through it; the background streets need to be safe and comfortable places to walk. Installation of street trees and pedestrian-scale lighting should be a minimum standard for these streets, with additional improvements at key locations as appropriate.

Objective: Continue to upgrade downtown “gateways” as important gathering places, street identifiers and major elements of the city fabric. Improvements should include a combination of trees, shrubs, and flowers, in conjunction with lighting, signage, furniture and public art.

Improvements to existing streets contribute to creating an inviting public realm.



Even in the cold winter months, Kellogg Mall is an outstanding urban park.



Park Maintenance

Goal 6:

Promote a high level of quality programming and maintenance of park, recreation and open space facilities within the public realm.

Park, recreation and open space facilities are key elements to the revitalization of the urban core. They are no longer mere luxuries, but necessities. Since the creation of new facilities will overwhelm an already overburdened park system, high-quality programming and maintenance are fundamental to the long-term use and success of these areas. Traditional resources to sustain parks, recreation and open space, such as tax appropriations, special tax districts and volunteerism, will continue to be utilized, but they can no longer be depended upon to be the sole supporting mechanism. Other options need to be considered.

Objective:

Encourage the formation of development associations as an integral part of new development projects, to be responsible for the programming and maintenance of the adjacent public realm such as public squares, open space and pathways.

The Lilydale/Harriet Island Regional Park Master Plan, approved in 1993, envisions a much improved riverfront park.



Objective:

Where feasible, include park, recreation and open space facilities with high entertainment and tourism value to generate revenue specifically dedicated to the on-going programming and maintenance of a high-quality public realm. Examples include areas for special events, pavilions, food service, excursion boat rides, docking facilities and equipment rental.

Parks and Squares

Goal 7:

Enrich the existing downtown and riverfront by creating new parks, village greens and signature open spaces in the urban core and along the riverfront.

Key to the structure of existing successful downtown districts (e.g. Rice Park, Irvine Park and Lowertown) are the signature village “greens” around which the districts are organized. The Framework extends this idea into redeveloped quadrants of the city, with new signature green spaces at the center of emerging villages and pedestrian-friendly connections between them. The Framework also calls for connections between these village greens and other existing or new city and riverfront parks.

Objective:

Open space and parks should be integrated into riverfront redevelopment, and should be linked to other existing or proposed park space to create a seamless flow into the urban core, such as between the new development on the Upper Landing Precinct, the proposed Science Museum Park and Lower Landing Park.

Objective:

Urban local streets should be improved over time to establish a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly green network that connects existing and proposed green spaces, such as along Wacouta Street from Mears Park to Lambert’s Landing.

New and improved parks, village greens and signature open spaces will enrich downtown and the riverfront.

Existing public spaces

1. Capital Mall
2. Mears Park
3. Kellogg Mall
4. Rice Park
5. Celebration Plaza (planned)
6. Irvine Park
7. Harriet Island Park
8. Raspberry Island
9. Lambert’s Landing

Proposed public spaces

10. Fitzgerald Park
11. Riverside Park
12. Railway Corridor Green
13. Harriet Island Village Park

Conceptual public spaces

14. Northwest Quadrant
15. Northeast Quadrant



A transition in grade adds visual interest to Irvine Park, one of Saint Paul's great urban squares.



Objective:

Develop multiple types of parks and open space to accommodate a wide range of uses for residents and workers in the area, such as Harriet Island Park (with programmed and active recreational opportunities), Lower Landing Park (with more passive recreational opportunities), and Lilydale Park (with more educational and wildlife opportunities).

Objective:

Where possible, locate a village green as the focus of emerging and proposed urban villages. These greens should be designed to accommodate a range of community and social events.

Natural Features

Goal 8:

Protect and enhance the environmental and aesthetic quality and integrity of Saint Paul's natural features.

In parallel with the Environmental Context Goals and Objectives (see Chapter 1), reconnecting natural features as part of the city green structure provides a unique opportunity for the public to experience the natural world within downtown Saint Paul. The fractured condition of existing remnant natural areas makes this a challenging, but essential, goal.

A prominent and thriving system of natural features has tremendous value, both environmentally and aesthetically, and can augment Saint Paul's built environment, creating a unique, healthy and vital urban area. It also adds a variety of new and reintroduced experiences to the growing list of recreational and educational opportunities in the downtown area. The Framework calls for the complete integration of natural systems into the overall development strategy, resulting in a more environmentally sustainable and economically viable city.

The exposed bluff face is visible in a number of locations throughout the downtown.



Objective: Protect and celebrate the unique bluff formations in and around downtown Saint Paul, including those adjacent the West Side, the Irvine Park neighborhood, and at Dayton's Bluff.

Objective: Where feasible, and as a part of a comprehensive stormwater management strategy, develop new wetlands/natural areas in the existing drainages upstream and downstream from the downtown core (Upper Landing Precinct and the mouth of the Phalen Creek-Trout Brook Reach), integrating interpretive and recreation uses into these areas.

Objective: Implement plans to improve access into natural areas for recreational and educational purposes, such as the Lilydale Park area, and a variety of greenway/trail corridors along the base of the bluffs and the river.

Objective: Plans for new development areas, such as the Science Museum and Upper Landing redevelopment projects, should include innovative and sustainable approaches for stormwater management that integrate landscape plantings.

Objective: Explore additional opportunities to enhance the natural qualities of the river itself, including greenway buffers, wildlife preserves, limited access areas, and other programs.

Saint Paul's natural features, including the Mississippi River and the bluffs, should be protected and enhanced. NSP is currently preparing an extensive landscaping plan for its downtown plant that will help to green the river valley.



Initiatives such as the Placemaking Workshop, sponsored by Public Art Saint Paul and the CapitolRiver Council, have identified a number of potential sites for public art.



Public Art

Goal 9:

Acknowledge and celebrate the role of public art in the downtown and riverfront area.

Public art is essential to the vitality and memory of our community. It is an icon of our identity, it memorializes our civic ideals and leaders, it provokes thought and catalyzes social action, and it creates public places that enhance our civic life.

The impetus for public art comes from many sources – from the character and need of a particular site; from a patron’s wish to publicly commemorate or memorialize a person, event or ideal; from a community’s wish to highlight and change social and environmental conditions; from an artist’s wish to express an aesthetic idea in a public context. There are many excellent opportunities for artists to participate in emerging public and private initiatives that will further enrich and energize Saint Paul’s public realm.

Objective:

Implement the “Action Public Art: Placemaking in Downtown Saint Paul” initiative and Public Art Saint Paul’s “20 by 2000” initiative as guiding strategies for developing art projects in the public realm.

Objective:

Use art in the public realm to further key goals of the Framework, such as linking urban villages, accenting important focal points and improving the pedestrian environment of the street.

Objective:

Establish funding mechanisms to ensure the integration of public art into both public and private initiatives throughout the downtown and riverfront.

Objective:

Use public art as an educational tool to develop a greater understanding of the physical and cultural history of Saint Paul.

Objective:

Continue to encourage a wide range of non-traditional public art projects that address issues in the natural environment, such as water quality and management, site restoration and preservation, and reforestation.

Objective:

When possible, include artists in the conceptualization and early design of infrastructure improvement projects.